SECURING COMMUNITIES FOR RECONSTRUCTION IN AFGHANISTAN

FINAL REPORT OF THE CONFLICT PREVENTION INITIATIVE E-CONFERENCE

29 APRIL – 10 MAY 2002

Harvard Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research
- Conflict Prevention Initiative -
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HPCR

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1. Introduction

For two weeks in April and May 2002, the Conflict Prevention Initiative (CPI) of the Harvard Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research (HPCR) hosted the first ever international e-conference on "Securing Communities for Reconstruction in Afghanistan," attracting over 90 participants. The majority of the participants were Afghan NGO and civil society leaders working in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Others included representatives of various inter-governmental organizations, INGOs, academic institutions and donor governments. This report summarizes the principal themes of the discussion and concludes with a series of recommendations for various actors involved in the process of reconstruction in Afghanistan. These recommendations include both those specifically formulated by participants as well as those drawn more generally from the conference discussion. In addition, actual quotes from the participants are interspersed throughout the report in shaded boxes to suggest the richness and depth of the discussion.

The e-conference was preceded by conversations with NGO leaders in Kabul, as well as roundtables with Afghan civil society leaders in Peshawar, Pakistan and Mashad and Zahedan, Iran. The roundtables were designed both to produce substantive inputs for the e-conference as well as to gather perspectives from those who may not have regular internet access. In this way, both the roundtables and the e-conference were designed to engage participants from their separate localities and yet still connect them with broader discussions and analysis.

2. Background on HPCR & the Conflict Prevention Initiative (CPI)

The Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research (HPCR) is a research and policy program based at Harvard University in Cambridge, MA. The Program is engaged in research and advisory services on conflict prevention strategies, the management of humanitarian crises and the protection of civilians in conflict areas. The Program advises international organizations, governments, and non-governmental actors and focuses on the protection of vulnerable groups, conflict prevention strategies, and the role of information technology in emergency response.

A key project of the Program is the Conflict Prevention Initiative (CPI), a website interface on conflict prevention and crisis management developed in partnership with the UN Executive Office of the Secretary General and the UN Department of Political Affairs. The CPI website provides an interactive virtual platform for policy and decision makers to gain access to information and academic resources as well as online discussion forums and conferences on conflict prevention strategies. In light of recent military, political and humanitarian developments in Afghanistan, the Program has established a

dedicated CPI web platform to provide easy access to information and strategic analyses on the current situation in Afghanistan and the Central Asia region. In addition to the CPI collection of links to online documents, HPCR is providing original policy inputs on the challenges of rehabilitating Afghan society. The policy activities of the Program include the preparation of briefs, the dissemination of key information on the situation, networking among field contacts, and, as needed, the convening of expert consultations on strategic issues that might help to better inform decision-makers.

The principal objective of the current phase of the CPI Central Asia project is to facilitate the engagement of Afghan civil society in the debates and decisions about the political, economic, and social future of the country. An important impulse behind the Harvard Program's efforts to host an event that would so engage civil society leaders from the region was an intuition that the internationalization of the current reconstruction process had rendered local civil society organizations voiceless. Many had been active for several years in preparing for the moment when their country would be ready for a concerted rehabilitation effort. When that moment arrived, however, the avenues through which they could engage and influence the international effort turned out to be limited. HPCR's consultations with Afghans in Kabul and roundtables in Pakistan and Iran confirmed that many ideas and concerns have not been receiving attention by the international community.

The e-conference was thus a venue to transcend the practical challenges associated with bringing widely dispersed actors together to provide an opportunity for engagement with each other and, through reports such as this one, with international actors. The e-conference therefore proved an important event for learning through aggregating diverse perspectives. The implicit message of the active participation of local actors is that the e-conference format can be an important forum for ongoing discussions with many actors involved in the reconstruction process, infusing international assistance with a process of constant feedback and sharing of perspectives.

While it is clear that aid provision must be carefully coordinated to achieve the complex objectives of reconstruction, the e-conference program rests on the notion that activities which promote learning and widespread civil society engagement should proliferate throughout Afghan society. The more fora through which Afghans can interact with each other and with others interested in the reconstruction process, the richer the learning process can be. Reconstruction is a complex process; no single master plan can capture the breadth of activity nor resolve all the difficult policy challenges that lie ahead. The only feasible approach is one that recognizes diverse efforts, creates multiple fora for many voices to be heard and engaged, and emphasizes learning and collaboration. The HPCR e-conference is intended to contribute to such an approach.

3. Executive Summary

The e-conference was a lively site for wide-ranging discussion on the reconstruction process. Views were diverse and several core themes were apparent. Although not all participants agreed on all issues, a consensus did emerge in a number of key areas. This section summarizes the major themes, while the next section elaborates them in more detail and identifies policy recommendations.

A theme of the overall discussion was that a comprehensive understanding of security was essential to any reconstruction effort. Physical safety—that is, security of person and property—is clearly an important priority. But broader insecurities, if left unaddressed, can render unsustainable a physical security that is ensured only by military or police. Thus, participants were careful to consider insecurity arising from threats to economic well being, income, and livelihood; health and education; food and water; religious freedom and ethnic tolerance; and territorial integrity and sovereign independence arising from foreign intervention. All of these dimensions were closely linked so that a weakness in one area would have implications for others. Thus, the reconstruction process needs to move forward on all these dimensions simultaneously for a sustainable peace to be achieved.

This broad understanding of security was a common thread through many of the specific topics discussed by participants. These substantive issues can be summarized as follows:

- The **Loya Jirga** was seen as an important step in the process of reaching a political settlement, but participants expressed concerns about its numerous shortcomings. Consequently, expectations about what the Loya Jirga can deliver must be moderated, and attention must not be diverted from other critical reconstruction priorities.

- Security is severely threatened by the presence of **warlords**, but it is important to recognize that each warlord is motivated by a different set of interests; thus, policy toward them must be individually tailored. Moreover, warlords are a symptom of underlying conditions of poverty and illiteracy; if these conditions are not addressed, warlordism will be ineradicable.

- **Physical safety** is being at least partly addressed by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul but continues to be a significant concern in the rest of the country. Expanding ISAF to other major centers appears to be essential, but should be accompanied by building on existing community based processes of conflict prevention and security in rural areas.

- **International assistance** must be attentive to the need to build, rather than compromise, local capacity and strive for accountability and coordination. Moreover, a series of substantive tensions must be carefully balanced in formulating an assistance strategy: between ‘quick impact projects’ to meet urgent

needs and carefully assessed, collaboratively developed programs for longer term issues; between national infrastructure in Kabul and regional and local investment; and between strengthening the government and strengthening the local NGO sector.

- Reconstruction is not only about economic or institutional aid; it is also a process of **national unity and reconciliation**. Although participants disagreed about the nature of ethnic and linguistic tension in the country, the need to foster a culture of peace through tolerance and reconciliation was identified as essential.

- Ultimately, peace will be the outcome of a process of **community development and civil society engagement**. Democracy should not be thought of simply in terms of creating national institutions, but rather by deepening the capacities of individual communities to govern themselves, in the best tradition of Afghanistan. Thus, investments in national infrastructure must be accompanied by the revitalization and strengthening of local community governance structures and broad-based engagement of civil society.

4. Discussion & Recommendations

4. 1. Loya Jirga

Conference participants were ambivalent about the Loya Jirga process. On the one hand, many recognized that it was an important step in the process of reaching a political settlement that recognized Afghanistan's own traditions and history. On the other hand, many were concerned that expectations were too high since the Loya Jirga also exhibited significant limitations in achieving the goals of a democratic and peaceful Afghanistan.

Some conference participants believed that the Loya Jirga was indicative of the democratic nature of traditional structures of decision making in Afghanistan. Traditionally, the people of the country had an important role in governance, and only recently when the connection between "rulers" and "the people" had become severed had political peace suffered. The traditional structure valued culture and religion as paramount, and fostered the unity of the Afghan people. The present Loya Jirga could draw upon this tradition of unity, and declare a new strategic approach for reconstruction on behalf of all Afghans which would be the centerpiece for the coordination of international and local efforts. Although Loya Jirgas in the past have often turned a blind eye to issues of ethnicity, linguistic diversity, and group exclusion, this Loya Jirga could provide a good forum to discuss and debate the issues in an inclusive manner.

Many others raised significant concerns about the use of the Loya Jirga to secure the future political peace of Afghanistan. Some were concerned that the practical

arrangements for the Loya Jirga would undermine its effectiveness. The selection process seems to have been tainted by the presence of armed groups who were hindering the ability of people to freely express their views. And although a small number of seats at the Loya Jirga have been reserved for NGO representatives, the broader processes through which the Loya Jirga would engage civil society groups and local communities in its deliberations remain unclear, generating concerns that the Loya Jirga would be simply a conversation among elites who are socially and culturally alienated from the vast majority of Afghans. Historically, Loya Jirga participation was by selection rather than by election, and therefore the model does not contemplate an expression of public will through representation.

"To be credible, the Loya Jirga will have to be transparent, representative, and participatory. If it fails to meet popular expectations … the transitional administration will lack legitimacy and popular support."

Aside from these practical concerns, some participants suggested that the history of Loya Jirgas did not bode well for the success of the current effort. For instance, since consensus is usually the mode of decision making, small groups have been able to hold up the entire process in order to pursue their own narrow agenda. Additionally, past Loya Jirgas have not contributed to political peace. King Amanullah, Daoud, Najibullah, and Mullah Omar all faced severe political turmoil and eventually fell from power despite having supportive Loya Jirgas.

Finally, some were concerned that the Loya Jirga's capacity to make and implement decisions in support of peace was limited. First, the representatives to the Loya Jirga need conflict management and peacebuilding training, otherwise the discussion could simply lapse into traditional disputes. Second, the procedures typically have just provided for speeches by dominant figures rather than any real analysis or deliberation of issues. Third, the extent to which the Loya Jirga's decisions will be respected and implemented by the people in different parts of the country remains an open question.

Even in the face of these fundamental concerns, however, the participants as a whole expressed cautious optimism that the Loya Jirga process would move the process of peace forward to the next stage. The Loya Jirga is thus probably best understood not as the realization of a democratic ideal, but rather as the next step in defusing conflict and building democracy slowly. Even for this to occur, however, a few conditions would have to be met. Expectations for what the Loya Jirga would achieve would have to be moderated; it would not usher in democracy in one miraculous step, but would be a bridge to a new political settlement. Not everyone will get what they want from the outcome so a strategy to deal with dissatisfied groups will be necessary. Furthermore, transparency and equal representation are key to ensuring its legitimacy in the eyes of the people. People must understand their right to participate, and must be invited into the process.

"Loya Jirga is a major step towards the long journey of achieving relative peace and representative governance in Afghanistan. The subsequent selection, processes/elections will hopefully improve upon the Loya Jirga and gradually voices from below will influence the kind of people and governments to emerge. It will certainly take time, patience and consistence on the part of international community and Afghans before we see a visible change in the post-Taliban Afghanistan. One step at a time!"

Participants also discussed essential elements of a new constitution, with a special focus on guaranteeing basic civil and political rights as well as equality of all Afghans irrespective of ethnicity, language, religion, or gender.

Recommendations

- Communicate moderate expectations for what the Loya Jirga can accomplish; emphasize its role as one step in the broader process of political settlement rather than as a moment of transformation to democracy.
- The Afghan administration and the UN should develop a strategy for dealing with the potential for dissatisfied groups emerging from the Loya Jirga, ensuring that they do not become spoilers to the overall process.
- The Loya Jirga should seek to be as transparent as possible in its deliberations, and not shy away from confronting the most challenging issues the country faces. It should insist on the same transparency in any governance processes that it launches.
- The Loya Jirga should ensure that the new constitution enshrines basic political and civil rights for all Afghans irrespective of language, ethnicity, religion, or gender.

4. 2. Warlords

A significant part of the conference discussion revolved around the issue of warlords and their impact on security in different parts of the country. Discussions on this issue followed two simultaneous tracks: understanding who the warlords were and considering the context in which they were emerging as powerful actors.

Participants quickly realized that the blanket term "warlord" was not helpful in describing the very different individuals who comprised the group. Different warlords have different interests; equating Padshah Khan Zadran in Gardez, Ismail Khan in Herat, Rashid Dostum in Mazar-e-Sharif and Yunus Khalis in Jalalabad obscures rather than sheds light on the problem. One participant suggested that it would be better to understand the

warlords as "spoilers," interested in disrupting the peace and reconstruction process. Some of these were "total spoilers," seeking to frustrate peace at any cost. Others were "limited spoilers" who could be convinced to support peace if some set of their political interests were met. Still others were "greedy spoilers" whose primary interests were economic, and could be potentially "paid off" to support peace. The other benefit of abandoning the label "warlord" and generating names that better describe their interests is that it focuses discussion on the actual grievances and legitimate concerns they bring to the table, rather than dismissing them as simply "evil". Eliminating warlords is a remote possibility; the only way to deal with them is to create the institutional infrastructure within which they can pursue their interests peacefully. Although some participants expressed concern in allowing these actors to escape their past misdeeds with impunity, others felt resigned to include them with the hope of transforming them into legitimate participants. They feared that warlords would wreak havoc if excluded.

Other participants were more interested in considering the conditions that allowed for warlords to assume positions of such power and influence in the country. The underlying impulse for this analysis was that the warlords were a symptom of a deeper set of issues. Removing warlords, on this view, would not result in peace, but only pave the way for others to take their place if the underlying problems were not addressed. After all, Afghanistan now needs builders and visionaries, not warlords who are more interested in destroying peace. Some participants expressed significant doubts whether simply paying off warlords could ever bring sustained peace. The consensus appeared to be that economic depravation was the central underlying problem creating the opportunity for warlordism: poverty makes communities particularly vulnerable to exploitation by warlords. This economic vulnerability, coupled with illiteracy and poor educational opportunities, is leading to a certain ideological or political vulnerability that allows warlords to manipulate communities more easily.

"Accepting the realities on the ground, it seems like we have to live with many objectionable characters for quite some time. What seems to be promising, however, is that in exchange for new labels such as "legitimization," a chance for peace will hopefully prevail. While the exploitations and manipulations would not come to an immediate end, we will probably see a positive transformation process begin. Maybe this time the incentives of playing peace outweigh those of instigating violence."

Having identified the central problem in this way, the imperative for economic development is obvious. One participant insisted that the only way to end the hold of warlords was to engage young men in high impact development programs so that they lessen their dependence on warlords and realize the immediate gains of peace. Since warlords seem to have control over many common community resources in the rural areas, ensuring access to these resources by all people without recourse to warlords is an urgent priority.

"We [must] engage these young men in development program activities and bring them away from fighting … towards active participation in the reconstruction of our homeland which in turn will help in securing the reconstruction process in Afghanistan."

Recommendations

- Warlords should not be thought of as an undifferentiated group; each should be seen as an individual, with responses tailored to the specific interests and concerns of each one.
- Economic development assistance and alternative income generation projects should be undertaken as a priority in communities that are affected by warlords.

4. 3. Safety: military presence and community processes

Both the presence of ISAF and the ongoing U.S. military operation against Al-Qaeda were subjects of discussion. On ISAF, participants insisted that security in Kabul did not mean security in the rest of the country. Therefore, the need to expand ISAF to other major centers was seen as imperative. In the same vein, training a national army and police service were seen as important to alleviate dependence on ISAF.

The importance of a professional, disciplined, and civilian controlled national army and police service were reiterated several times. They were seen as integral parts of a functioning national legal system, a prerequisite to general disarmament in the population, and essential to the capacity of the national government to gain credibility and extend its mandate to the entire country.

In the meantime, however, participants seemed to recognize that the prospect of ISAF expanding beyond urban centers to the rest of the country was dim, and some suggested that such an expanded international military presence may not even be desirable. Instead, it was important to build upon current community-based processes of security. Communities in many parts of Afghanistan have developed their own methods of ensuring security that have persisted even in the face of many years of conflict. In this way, community survival has depended, and will likely continue to depend on localized practices of accommodation and cooperation between and among communities to ensure safety and security.

"There is a risk in assuming that conflict-resolution is something that Afghans might not know about, because of their turbulent past. While urban communities are currently more reliant for security on ISAF (in the case of Kabul) and the regional authorities (elsewhere), many rural Afghans maintain a form of fragile peace by accommodation, within and between communities."

Nonetheless, other participants suggested that many of these community processes had been severely compromised during the war: they must be purposefully revived rather than simply assumed to be fully functional. In any event, they cannot be successful on their own. They require a complementary set of national institutions to support and underwrite

them: a legal framework, police and military personnel, funding and official recognition, among others.

Several participants expressed concerns about the ongoing international military operation against Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces. Concerns ranged from the future implications of enlisting and arming Afghan proxies to wage the war on the ground at a time when the focus needed to be on disarmament to the effect of international military objectives on local processes of mediation and tribal accommodation as in Gardez.

Recommendations

- ISAF should be expanded to other major urban centers in Afghanistan.
- The creation of well trained and disciplined national army and police service should be a priority in the reconstruction process.
- Community-based security processes should be identified, supported, and revitalized.
- The creation of national infrastructure should be prioritized with a clear view to supporting rather than displacing such localized processes.

4. 4. International Aid

The lively discussion about the nature and prospects for international assistance to the reconstruction process focused on three themes: local capacity, accountability & coordination, and effectiveness.

Local Capacity. The effect on local capacity of current methods of assistance was a significant concern along three dimensions. First, participants cited evidence of a "brain drain", whereby skilled Afghans were migrating from the government and local NGOs to the UN and large international NGOs who were providing significantly higher salaries. This trend has had a debilitating effect on local organizations' ability to contribute effectively to reconstruction. Second, the sudden and dramatic increase in international efforts to provide aid threatens to create dependency on international assistance and a lack of ownership of the reconstruction program by Afghans themselves. The anxiety about creating dependency seems exacerbated by a lingering uncertainty about how long the international community can be relied upon to provide aid. Much of the money pledged at the Tokyo Conference has yet to be disbursed and other pressing international matters may divert international attention from Afghanistan. The concern is that Afghans will then be left with little indigenous capacity to carry on the process. Third, some participants expressed concern that the government was being marginalized in delivering key services as NGOs and the UN stepped in to fill urgent needs. The inadvertent consequence is that the government may be losing (or simply not gaining) credibility in the eyes of Afghans.

"… unless there is a sense of ownership and the feeling of having a say at the community level, the people may continue to suffer …"

Of course, international assistance was recognized as essential to reconstruction, but it was equally clear that assistance had to be managed carefully to ensure that it was truly a process of reconstruction rather than simply humanitarian aid. One participant suggested that this was a symptom of the inability of the international aid community to shift from a mindset of a complex political emergency to that of a post-war reconstruction. In the latter scenario, the imperative must be to ensure that aid lasts no longer than necessary to empower communities to address their own problems.

The result was a call for international actors—the UN, donor governments, international NGOs—to reconsider their methods of engaging Afghans in reconstruction. The international community must create the space for the government to fulfill its functions, and support it in doing so. Likewise, international NGOs should seek to collaborate with local partners at every moment, rather than appropriating their skilled staff. This will increase the credibility and legitimacy of the government as well as strengthen civil society and community participation.

"If we help people through NGOs, people will be dependent on NGOs and they will want support and help from the NGOs, so relations between the people and government will become weaker and weaker. But when we help them through the government, they will trust their government and will support it so in this case not only we help the people but also we build a strong relation between people and government."

Accountability & Coordination. Participants recognized that coordination was something many had been concerned about and had been widely discussed, but raised questions about whether the current assistance approach could be characterized as coordinated. Indeed, one participant suggested that the various coordinating bodies themselves lacked coordination. Another participant suggested that the only viable approach was to adopt a 'systems' approach that included donors, various intermediary organizations, and beneficiaries. On this view, the system's overall management and coordination depended on (a) an articulated and widely shared common objective, (b) a common means of coordinating at and across all three levels, and (c) a feedback mechanism to allow for ongoing assessment of effectiveness. In the absence of this overall management, competition sets in among different agencies, leading to adverse outcomes such as the skyrocketing rents in Kabul.

"Shouldn't one question the gap of coordination between the Coordination Bodies with open doors to anyone who is interested in making an NGO? How to make these COORDINATORS Coordinated?"

A second concern was accountability of all actors providing assistance. Participants called for more transparency in the operations of all actors so their donors, methods, and results would be open to public scrutiny.

Effectiveness. Comments about the effectiveness of international assistance were of two kinds: some concerned the work and capacity of the NGO sector, while others concerned substantive choices and priorities for reconstruction.

The most provocative suggestion, supported by several participants, was to create a process of certification for NGOs wishing to operate in Afghanistan. The suggestion rests on a number of issues. First, participants expressed concern about the rapid proliferation of international NGOs that had no prior experience in Afghanistan and seemed to be just following new opportunities for funding. These NGOs were detracting from the efforts of NGOs who had a long history of performance in Afghanistan, and were familiar with the country's historical and cultural context. Certification would also alleviate many accountability concerns. Moreover, certification would ensure that collaboration in support of national objectives replaced uncoordinated activity. One participant suggested that the Ministry of Planning should develop a set of criteria in consultation with NGOs, the UN, donor governments, and others, and then create a commission to certify individual NGOs according to those criteria.

"… it is now time to screen the INGOs, from their technical expertise to professional levels. The time should cease for Pocket NGOs, individuals carrying their whole offices, letterheads, stamps and going around to seek funding for various projects. The Ministry of Planning should adopt criteria and request all NGOs to re-register."

Other concerns about the NGO sector related to the limited capacity to absorb the funds being pledged given the history of inattention and inactivity in Afghanistan. This is exacerbated by the fact that many NGOs working in Afghanistan have focused largely on short-term relief rather than longer-term reconstruction activity. Still other concerns had dealt with the lack of mutual understanding between different NGOs, local and international, in Afghanistan. Workshops and conferences that bring together NGOs to share experiences and learn about and from each other would be an important element in addressing this issue.

A second set of concerns about aid effectiveness concerned a series of strategic choices and tensions that were being made. One significant tension was connected with the pace of reconstruction. On the one hand, participants recognized the importance of 'quick impact projects' to meet urgent needs and sustain the peace process during this fragile time; yet, on the other hand, many believed that sustained success could only be achieved through careful, collaborative planning with appropriate needs assessments based on reliable information and broad participation. Although 'quick impact projects' were important, reconstruction is a long-term process and therefore should not be rushed at the expense of in-depth planning and participation. Moreover, the way immediate needs are

met will affect the future shape of Afghanistan. Merely addressing urgent issues, therefore, is not an option: the work of humanitarian aid and security in Kabul must be accompanied by carefully planned and considered assistance for security in the rest of the country, a political settlement, and state infrastructure such as a civil service, legal system, education, and economic development. Addressing such issues as rights may not seem urgent, but are in fact important for laying the groundwork for a peaceful future during this transitional period.

Another tension concerned the choice between concentrating efforts on Kabul and on the rest of the country. Some participants recognized the importance of building up national infrastructure as an essential element of reconstruction, while others suggested that partnering only with the central government could create unhealthy competition in the regions, and ignore significant needs in areas where most of the population lives.

Other participants raised concerns about whether donors should concentrate on strengthening government capacity to deliver important public services or invest in strengthening the Afghan NGO sector since the government would not be able to serve the whole country in the short term. One participant suggested that one overarching goal should guide all substantive and strategic decisions about reconstruction: to address the needs of the most vulnerable in Afghan society.
Many participants suggested that the first priority had to be economic development. Allowing people to improve their lives through stable homes and incomes is the best recipe for stability, security, and peace. Until Afghans reach economic security, they will not be able to lessen their dependence on ISAF and other international assistance.

Recommendations

- The aid community—UN, international and local NGOs, donor governments—should consider ways of collaborating with the Afghan administration and local NGOs to, for example, share Afghan employees, in order to avoid 'brain drain' and competition with high salaries.
- The aid community should develop a policy framework that clarifies the roles of all the parties involved in aid—the AIA, local NGOs, international NGOs, donor governments, the UN and other multilateral organizations—with specific focus on ensuring that the Afghan government and local NGOs are given ample opportunities to develop their own capacities and eventually take over responsibilities from the UN and international NGOs.
- The aid community should develop mechanisms for accounting for their activities and use of funds, not only to their donors but to Afghan beneficiaries as well.
- The aid community should create better vehicles for coordination, and yield to the Afghan government's attempts at ensuring a coherent aid program.
- The Afghan government should develop a process of NGO certification to ensure quality, accountability, and coordination among NGOs as well as a process of monitoring and evaluation in each area of development programming, to assess progress, to learn from experience, and to maintain accountability.

4. 5. National Unity and Social Cohesion

"Afghans today have little basis to trust their own recent history; too much remains hidden. The country has become a cauldron of interlocking conspiracies, both real and imagined, a maze of fractured mirrors designed by war-makers who embraced deception as a winning weapon. Afghanistan's successful reconstruction as even a semi-normal country, then, must eventually include some reclamation by Afghans of the truth about their recent past."

The participants were eager to move beyond surface symptoms of insecurity to interrogate more deeply the set of fundamental building blocks that would establish sustainable peace in Afghanistan in the future. One such building block was the issue of social cohesion after two decades of violence that has exacerbated ethnic, religious, and linguistic cleavages.

Participants were uniformly concerned that a cultural change needed to occur, replacing a mindset of violence with one of peace. Two decades of war have engendered "conflictive minds," and therefore peace will only result if individual Afghans change their way of thinking about social problems. Many participants thus advocated peace education workshops and training for all Afghans, as well as peace curriculum development for schools.

The issue of ethnic division sparked important discussion and revealed some fundamental disagreements. Some participants believed that ethnic division was an inherent part of Afghan history and society. Although elites may believe in national unity, ordinary people have developed deep feelings of hatred toward Afghans of other ethnicities. Consequently, the prospects of a united Afghanistan seemed dim to these participants.

Most participants, however, were adamant that ethnic tensions were the result of foreign entrepreneurs who had fueled inter-group conflicts to achieve their own goals, rather than an inherent part of Afghan society. On this view, ethnic divisions were a new phenomenon, standing in stark contrast to a history in which ethnicity was not part of the consciousness of most Afghans. One participant pointed to a long history of ethnic cooperation, relating a specific anecdote about how Pashtun villagers in Ghazni twice supported the neighboring Hazara community when they were suffering at the hands of strict blockades, first by Hafizullah Amin's pro-Soviet regime and then by the Taliban. Indeed, this participant suggested that ethnic harmony was simply a fact of life among the masses, and an ethnic consciousness was only an elite preoccupation. Overall, most participants felt that an Afghan identity transcending all ethnic groups was strong, even if that identity did not translate into a full consensus on how to govern the country.

"The diverse cultures and backgrounds of Afghans have been extensively exploited over the years of protracted civil strife. Bringing them together and building the spirit of national integrity, tolerance and unity amongst populations representing various ethnicities and backgrounds could not be taken as an overnight task."

Some participants suggested that whatever the genealogies of the ethnic tensions, there was a need to develop an institutional response in order to promote social healing in Afghanistan. One participant raised the possibility of a People's Council for National Understanding ("Shuraa-I-mardurn Braa-e Tafahoom-e-Milli"), to promote a sense of nationhood premised on respect, understanding, and tolerance of difference. It could also serve to help Afghans confront the truth about their recent past. Furthermore, the new constitution must enshrine full equal rights among all Afghans, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or gender.

Finally, one participant suggested that an important aspect of the process of national reconciliation was promoting a better understanding of Islam, through better monitoring of seminary activity and to ensure that religious leaders better represent the true religious convictions of Afghans.

Recommendations

- The Afghan government and UN should support efforts at peace education, not only for youth through schools, but also for the population at large through workshops, conferences, and mass media.
- The Afghan government should consider the establishment of a national council to promote reconciliation, understanding, and national unity among different groups in Afghanistan.

4. 6. Community Development and Civil Society Engagement

"In villages, towns and cities everywhere on earth there is a need to solve immediate problems while proactive work continues for long-term prosperity and security. Is there any reason why traditional shuras and newer village development associations cannot combine their knowledge, talent and efforts toward a good future for each and every Afghan?
I recall my memory attending an election process of a local shura in the western part of the country, where one ANGO was implementing some community development programmes. In this meeting many people, including some commanders, were also present. Before the nomination took place, a ground rule for how to proceed with the process and criteria for a good community leader were set, e.g., honesty, knowledge, negotiation skills, respect, literacy, trusted by the community, etc. Then the people started whispering to each other, and at last they came with a name of whom no one was even thinking before. The man stood up, with a charismatic smile and simple outfit came forward and exhibited his respect to the people. No one could say that he was not trusted, even the influential people present at the meeting. This could be a simple example that the potential and opportunities are there, but the challenge is how we make use of and maximize its utilization."

Democracy was an important theme of the e-conference and was connected to broader ideas about the importance of local communities in reconstruction. Participants suggested that while national infrastructure was important, peace would need to be earned bottom-up, by revitalizing community governance structures. Afghans could look for inspiration from their past; democracy, it was suggested, has a history in the country even if it is not expressed in familiar Western institutional forms. At the same time, many traditional practices would have to evolve in order to include all members of the community in governance.

Participants were uniform in calling for more attention to community development as an essential element of reconstruction. One participant noted that for most of Afghan history, power and control has been concentrated in Kabul, but this has been accompanied by short periods of political liberalization, where popular sovereignty and democratic institutions were built. These periods of liberalization could provide a basis for future institutional development. These national democratic institutions—parliament, an independent judiciary, etc.—however, cannot take the place of robust community governance structures.

Many participants discussed the history of community-based shuras as a model for a reinvigorated community development. While shuras were lauded as a means for community ownership over community problems, participants felt that they would need to evolve significantly to truly express democratic sentiments and effectively steward reconstruction at the community level. Thus, the spirit, but not the form of shuras should provide the roadmap for the future.

Traditionally, shuras included only males and played a reactive role to solving specific conflicts or problems in the community. What is needed today is a broad-based, inclusive structure that will be proactive in identifying community needs, planning development programs, and implementing them across various dimensions of community life. This approach will ensure that the needs of common Afghans are put first, that local communities have a say in the development programming that most affects them, and that reconstruction becomes a vehicle to improve the nature of people's relationships with one another in the context of authentic expressions of belief, culture, and tradition. This is a bottom-up view of security and democracy: starting with people's local relationships, ensuring that they are based on rights, obligations, and reconciliation, and creating connections and capacities to strengthen civil society. Security emerges as a result of such a process of participatory governance, rather than as a prerequisite.

The community development approach also requires investment in economic and social development. As one participant noted, illiteracy can severely limit the engagement of the population in the process of reconstruction. Therefore, education and health programs throughout the country, not just in Kabul, are essential.

This bottom-up view was not universally held among participants. At least one participant urged that the focus should be first on stability and good governance, not on democratic engagement. In fact, concentrating on democratic engagement could just as

easily lead to less rather than more stability. Democracy can be deferred until reconstruction is well underway. Another participant suggested that reconstruction of the economy must be the first priority: securing trade routes, investing in protection of body and property, and creating a climate to attract international investment.

Recommendations

- The international assistance program should invest in revitalizing and strengthening local community governance structures, inspired but not limited by traditional shuras, to develop capacity for self-government.
- National infrastructure development should be designed to be supportive of community-level governance and investment in such national infrastructure should be accompanied by community development efforts.
- The Afghan government should promote participatory decision-making, involving citizens and civil society in its activities.

ANNEX 1 – LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Abdul-Karim Khan
Abdul Razique Samadi
Ahmad Fahim Hakim
Alexander Their
Alison Betts
Ambrish Dhaka
Amelia Nice
Amena Chenzaie
Andrea Armstrong
Andrew Cox
Anna Walters
Anthea Sanyasi
Arif Surachman
Arnold Luethold
Asif Rahimi
Asila Wardak
Aurangzaib Khan
Barmak Pazhwak
Bernadette Sexton
Brian Williams
Chandra Lekha Sriram
Christoph Berg
Daniel Langenkamp
Dan Ryan
David J. Katz
David McLachlan-Karr
Diego Osorio
Dr. Annette Ittiq
Dr. Joseph Klaits
Dr. Syed Ali Wasif
Dr. Uwe Kievelitz
Dr. Abdul Wahid
Elizabeth Cabot
Elizabeth Winter
Eng. Naim Salimee
Esther Robinson
Fahim Youssofzai
Farda Asadov
Fazel-Rabi Haqbeen
Frank Method
Gul Rahman Qazi
Günther Baechler
Hakim Gul Ahmadi
Hamidullah Natiq
Helay Zadran
Homa Khalid
Homira Nassery
Humayun Hamidzada
Ijaz Khan
Ina Breuer
Isabelle Behm
Jean Kissell
Jean-Michel Monod
Joanna Santa Barbara
John Renninger
John Schoeberlein
Jolyon Leslie
Jonathan Goodhand
Kamol Abdullaev
Kanishka Nawabi
Karin Wermester
Ken Hurwitz
Kerri Sherlock
Kevin John Austin
Khaled Mansour
Laure Beaufils
Manouchehr Shiva
Mark Vcislo
Markus Muller
Martine van Bijlert
Maryem Sader
Michael Ignatieff
Michael Marx
Mirwais Nahzat Farahi
Mirza Abdul Hameed
Mohammed Ehsan Zia
Mohammad Ismail Qarizada
Mohammad Fayyazi
Mohammad Rafiq Ahmadzai
Mozhda Namwar
Muhammad Arif
Mustafa Aziz
Naqib Ahmad Noory
Nastaran Moossavi
Neguin Yavari
Nick Robson
Nishkala Suntharalingam
Oliver Ulich
Patricia Garcia
Paul O'Brien
Pierre Helg
Rahela Hashim
Ramesh Rajasingham
Raz Mohammad Dalili
Razia Stanikzai
Richard Conroy
Sajid Gill
Samina Ahmed
Sarah Bryce
Seddiq Weera
Sepideh Yousefzadeh Faal Deghati
Scott Smith
Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh
Shamila Chaudhary
Sharon Morris
Shepard Forman
Spyros Demetriou
Steve Gleason
Steven Sabol
Suba Chandran
Tahmina Mehrgan
Tahmina Rahaman
Teresa Cunningham
Tomas Nordberg
Umer Daudzai
Urs Beer
Vladimir Boyko
Wahid Sarij
Willem Vogelsang
William Wood

ANNEX 2 – CHARTS AND TABLES

The following charts and tables were contributed by Ahmad Fahim Hakim, program co-ordinator for Co-operation for Peace and Unity (CPAU), in the course of the conference. They bear directly on the principal themes enumerated in this report and make important contributions as fresh analyses to the challenges faced by Afghanistan.

Table 1

Violence Types	Physical Violences	Cultural Violences	Structural Violences
Family	• Beating • Child labor/forced labor • Calling names • Intimidation • Imprisonment • Depriving from food	• Deprivation of girls from education • Not allowing children to express their ideas • Unhealthy cultural values and traditions • Superstitions • Preference of boy vs girl • Men can easily get married for 2nd and 3rd time • Taunting language • Notion of son/daughter in law	• Spirit of indifference • Lack of freedom to express self opinions • Denying rights related to others • Poverty at the family level • Only one person as income earner • Malnutrition
Schools	• Beating • Use of sticks (most often and normally) • Calling names • Torture • Punishment • Sexual harassment/power abuse	• Messages of hatred • Top-down teaching approach • Students as objects • No room for students participation • Prejudice and discrimination • Taunting language	• Texts full of violence messages • Heavy subjects beyond understanding of students • Unilateral made curricula • No school facilities for all
Community/society	• Intimidation • Sexual abuse • Power abuse • Kidnapping • Killing • Beating • Torture • Isolation	• Forced marriages • Excessive expenses for wedding and condolence ceremonies • Not allowing women and children in decision making • Ethnic discrimination • Difference between man & woman • Taunting language • Deprivation of women from their inheritance rights	• Indifference to public assets • Poverty • Exploitation by those ceasing power (landlords and farmers) • No domestic laws
National	• Fighting • Killing • Arrest • Beating • Torture and amputation • Human rights abuse and grave violation • Demolished residential areas • Sexual abuse and trafficking • Drug and smuggling	• Lack of free media • Discrimination in recruiting governmental employees • Low roles for women in the government and state positions • Poor are poor because of their fate • Selection vs election • War and criminal economy • Not quality education • Taunting language	• Less chances for people to participate in social, cultural and political forums • Scourge of poverty • Inaccessibility to health and education facilities • Exploitation • Weal civil society with less influence • Unjust distribution of resources • Deprivation of people of their civil, economic and political rights • State building vs nation building

Table 2

How CPAU sees the interaction between various components of violence.

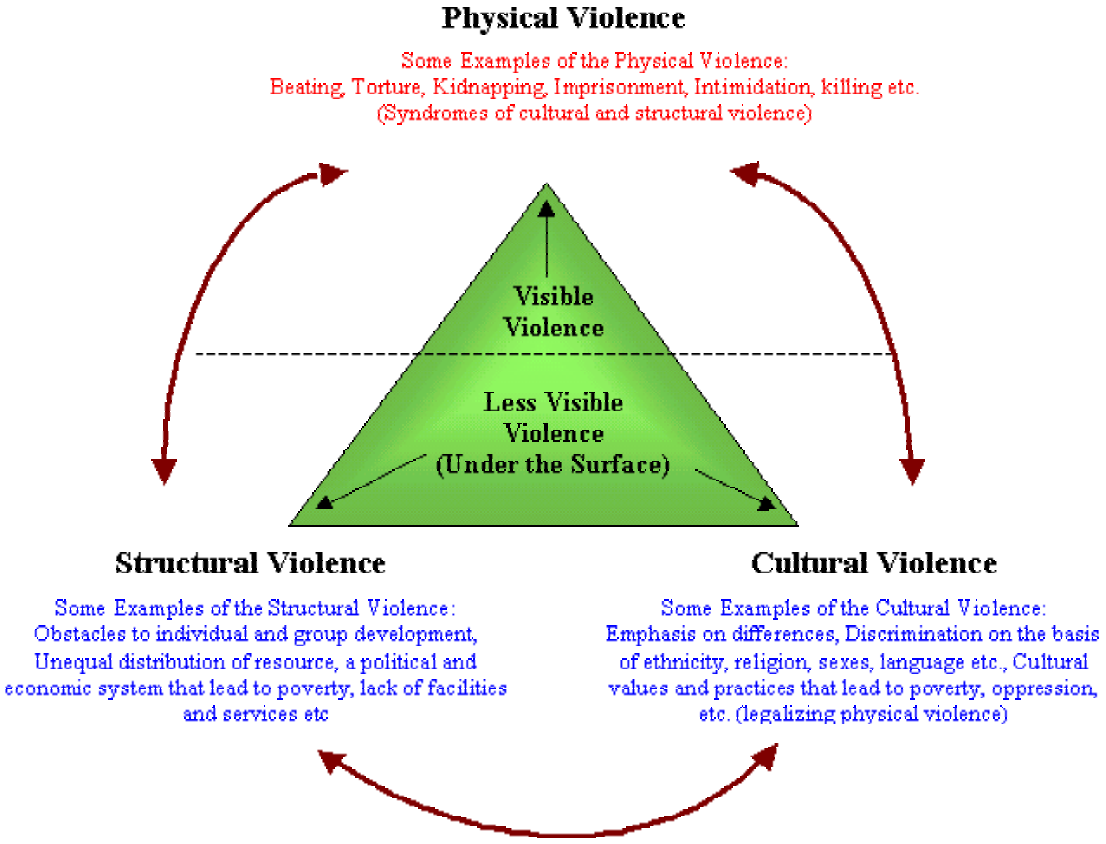

Table 3

	Traditional Shura	Village Development Association[1]
Membership	**Open**	**Fixed**
Member characteristics	• **Age** • **Religious competence** • **Conservative and more traditionalist** • **Economic power** • **Social power** • **Contact with Authority**	• **Having development vision** • **Have modern education** • **Representative of whole population** • **Contact with agencies** • **Willing to bring about changes**
Objectives	**Problem solving; Conflict resolution**	**Planning, Implementation, and running of community projects**
Function	**Reactive**	**Proactive**

[1]Village Development Association tends to address the root causes of conflicts not only the symptoms. It tends to use improved communication, negotiation and mediation skills for conflict resolutions and transformation. It tries to be proactive and to set up strategic thinking and objectives. It establishes contacts with other agencies in order to reduce economic, social and political vulnerabilities and decreases the level of defencelessness to external shocks.

Table 4

Change Required in Responses by Aid Community
From Complex Political Emergency to Post War Situation

Complex Political Emergency		Post-war Situation	
Feature	Responses by Aid Community	Feature	Responses by Aid Community
▪ Collapsed/failed State ▪ Corruption ▪ Extremes: rich/poor ▪ Warfare ▪ Lack of national plans ▪ Displacement ▪ Lack of law and order ▪ Lack of political will ▪ Insufficient funds for long-term programmes ▪ War/political economy ▪ Deprivation of women's social and civil rights ▪ Lack of rehabilitation and development by government ▪ Brain drain ▪ Low participation of civil society ▪ Mist trust ▪ Gross violation of human rights ▪ Traumatized people	▪ Life saving: emergency ▪ Short-term ▪ Coordination/info sharing ▪ Hardware eg technical ▪ Taking over form government ▪ Withdrawal due to security situation and adaptation to prevailing situation ▪ Micro-level intervention ▪ Dealing with symptoms	▪ Good will: political and economical ▪ Emphasis on rules and regulations/code of conduct and principles ▪ Agreement on new set-up of a government/administration ▪ Increase in bilateral/multilateral funding ▪ Transitional period ▪ Focus on national planning ▪ Increased interest for reconstruction by government and international community ▪ Returning of refugees and Diaspora ▪ Demobilization and demilitarization ▪ Hopes and optimism for better future leading to new commitments ▪ Emphasis on women's participation ▪ Emphasis on role of civil society ▪ Emphasis on effective govt. institutions building	▪ Life sustaining programmes ▪ Longer term programming ▪ Software eg attitudes ▪ Bridging role… ▪ Linking: government, local communities, international community, and private sector ▪ Facilitation ▪ Capacity building and development ▪ Adaptation? ▪ How to facilitate smooth transition from CPE to Reconstruction ▪ Changes required in organizations to meet the needs for a smooth transition ▪ Address or efforts to address the root causes of problems

Table 5

Illustration from the book 'People First' by Stan Burkey.